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ABSTRACT

The school principal's role in assisting teachers to excel at various types of reading instruction is discussed. This paper addresses several types of reading instruction and principal involvement: (1) guiding primary grade instructors to value their students' personalized reading experiences through familiarity and with demonstration of new approaches; (2) developing and informing teacher proficiency with using Big Books; (3) guiding teachers to use quality basal readers to benefit and encourage student reading; (4) being aware of the merits and drawbacks of reading instruction philosophies in relation to remedial readers; and (5) leading teachers to use various types of poetry instruction and encouraging student interest and experience in writing poems. In conclusion, the paper suggests that the principal plays a key role in assisting teachers to enable each pupil to become a successful reader. Contains 10 references. (EF)

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The School Principal As Leader in Reading Instruction

by Marlow Ediger

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THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL AS LEADER IN READING INSTRUCTION

The principal has a leading responsibility in improving the school curriculum. The first R (reading, writing,and arithmetic) is vital for all pupils to develop knowledge and skill in since reading cuts across the curriculum and is highly important in society. Thus, reading is used in each and every academic area of the school curriculum. Later, at the work place, reading skills are needed to perform well on the job or in the professions. Personal interests in the home setting may also necessitate reading as a means of recreation.

Teachers need to excel in reading instruction so that pupils become quality readers. The lay public continually expects higher achievement standards from pupils in reading. The principal of the school then has a vital role in assisting teachers to help each pupil become the best reader possible. What might the principal do to assist teachers to become instructors of excellence in the teaching of reading?

Helping Primary Teachers

The early days of the primary grades are the best to prepare children to love reading for its own sake as well as later for utilitarian purposes. Personalized reading can be an excellent way of instruction to meet needs of many youngsters. Here, the teacher needs to place fascinating objects on an interest center and have pupils view and discuss the contents. Sequentially, the teacher may record ideas provided by pupils directly related to the objects at the center. Pupils then see talk written down on the chalkboard or by using a word processor with an accompanying large screen. The recorded ideas may be read together with the teacher pointing to each word as it is being read. Rereading can be a good way to develop confidence in reading as well as to build a set of core words in the pupil's vocabulary in learning to read.

Several of the reading charts that come from children may be bound and used at later times in stimulating learner interest in in reading.

The role of the principal here, among others, is to guide teachers to perceive value in personalized reading experiences for pupils. The principal should be able to demonstrate teach diverse plans and programs of reading instruction. He/she needs to be a student of learning about newer and better approaches in the teaching of reading. Each pupil needs to achieve as optimally as possible in reading.

Closely related to personalized reading is an individualized program using library books instead of basal readers. A variety of topics or genres need to be available for pupils to select library books for sequential reading. These books, too, should be on different reading

levels so that a pupil may locate a suitable book to read, based on his or her present achievement level in reading. Periodically, the pupil should have a conference with the teacher to appraise the quality of comprehension as well as word recognition skills, the latter through orally reading a given selection from the book read. The teacher may keep notes on the progress of each learner and file the information for the next conference. Comparisons might then be made of earlier with later conferences to notice progress of a learner in reading. The one on one approach here-- the pupil and the teacher-- is psychologically sound. A pupil is rarely able to have the teacher's time be his/her time. Assistance may then be provided for each child as is necessary to improve the pupil's comprehension and word recognition skills. This procedure of reading instruction may be used when the pupil has first started to recognize words and is curious about abstract symbols and their related words.

The role of the principal should be one of providing leadership and demonstrate how to use effectively any innovative procedure in reading instruction (Ediger, 1999, Chapter Five).

The Big Book Approach

In addition to personalized reading and individualized procedures, discussed above, the principal may inform or develop increased teacher proficiency by using Big Books in reading instruction. These books are large enough for pupils to see in a small group or for the entire classroom. The important point is that all pupils in a committee or class as a whole can see clearly the words in the Big Book. First, the teacher may discuss the related pictures with pupils that relate directly to the abstract words. Pupils should understand content in the pictures and also be able to relate these illustrations to their very own personal lives. Thus, meaning in learning is being stressed. Next, the teacher points to each word and reads aloud as pupils watch carefully so that a basic sight vocabulary will be developed. This is followed by pupils reading aloud with the teacher as the latter again points to the words and phrases bring read. Rereading may occur as often as is necessary or desired. Sometimes, pupils ask to reread content again and again due to inherent interest and enjoyment.

Principals and teachers should attend professional meetings in the teaching of reading on the local, state, and national levels. Here, new information on reading instruction is being disseminated. Access to Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) should also be available to the principal and teachers. ERIC listings might well encourage the principal and teachers to become involved in modifying and changing the reading curriculum from what is to what should be (Ediger, 1997, Chapter Eleven).

Basal Reader Use

Basal readers and their use in the reading curriculum has received many criticisms in the educational literature. This is hard to understand why. Basals are neutral materials of instruction, neither good nor bad, but their quality use depends upon a knowledgeable and skillful reading instructor. No doubt, basals have the same weaknesses as does library books. Thus, there are better basal readers put out by some companies as compared to others. Selected stories in a basal will capture learner interest more so than others in the same textbook. Some library books, too, will interest a pupil more than will others. It is true that a pupil choosing his/her own library book to read may make the choice based on personal criteria, such as purpose, fascination, illustrations therein, and readability. the learner does the choosing of sequential library books to read. In a basal reader, all pupils, generally, in a classroom read the same story content . An advantage here is that the teacher may build readiness within pupils for reading a specific story. Thus, the teacher may

1. discuss the illustrations within the selection so that pupils have access to knowledge which will assist in comprehending the content better that would otherwise be the case. Pupils may also be helped to relate the ensuing ideas to be read to their very own personal lives.
2. new vocabulary may be printed on the chalkboard and discussed with learners, so that they may recognize these words as they engage in oral or silent reading.
3. pupil word recognition skills may be analyzed and weaknesses remedied when learners individually read a selection aloud. Phonics, syllabication, and context clues to identify the unknown might then be taught within the reading lesson. The teacher may help pupils to identify questions and problems which require information from the content to be read, as well as from other reference sources.
4. assistance with diverse levels of cognition may well be in the offing with teacher help. These higher levels of cognition include critical and creative thinking, as well as problem solving within the framework of story content.
5. followup experiences for pupils include making murals, dramatizing, construction activities, and working with puppetry to reveal comprehension and extension of story content from the basal.

The teacher takes a very visible role in teaching reading when basals are used. However, pupils have many opportunities to raise questions and identify problems in a child centered curriculum. Learner input is to be encouraged in the basal reading program.

Principals have a vital role to play in guiding teachers to use quality basal readers in a way that truly benefits and encourages learners to improve reading comprehension and skills. The teacher makes the difference in how basals are used, since they are neutral initially, in being neither good nor bad in terms of instructional materials. The principal of the school needs to assist teachers to use basal readers in a professional way so that all pupils become better readers sequentially, as much as individual optimal abilities permit. The following are important pointers for principals to use in helping teachers use basal readers to guide optimal pupil achievement:

1. make certain that pupils possess prerequisite subject matter so that the ensuing reading of content will be meaningful.
2. assist pupils to recognize those words that will be unknown prior to reading the new lesson.
3. provide leadership as the ongoing reading lesson continues with encouragement, consideration of pupil questions along the way, helping with pronouncing words that are still unknown, and use stimulating approaches to assess pupils prior to, during, and after the reading activity has been completed.
4. use appropriate principles of learning from educational psychology to provide quality sequence for pupil learning in the reading curriculum.
5. plan the next lesson to incorporate what pupils did not know nor understand (Ediger, 1999, 50-56).

Diagnosis and Remediation

Even with the best of planning and implementation by competent reading teachers, there will still be pupils who did not achieve reading objectives for one reason or another. For a good reading lesson to come about, it takes a professional reading teacher and cooperation from pupils. If pupils misbehave, the chances are they will lack achieving selected objectives. One cannot always blame the teacher when pupils do not achieve, develop, and grow. Pupils, too, need to be accountable by putting forth effort and trying. Parents also have a major role in helping pupils learn to read. Parents cannot wash their hands in teaching/learning and expect the teacher to do it all. Parents, also, must assist their offspring to behave well in school and have a desire to learn. Parents need to model enthusiasm when reading aloud to pupils in the home setting. They need to read to themselves in order to show to their offspring that reading is enjoyable. Complaining about the quality of reading instruction will do little good. What does help is for all involved to get together and work in the direction of helping the learner achieve vital objectives so that a good reader will be an end result. This definitely is possible. Working together for the good of the child is an

excellent motto to follow in word and in deed.

From feedback of pupil achievement in reading, what does a pupil lack? What is lacking needs to become reading objectives for pupil attainment. In supervising student teachers and cooperating teachers in the public schools, I have noticed some common errors of pupils which then might become objectives for the latter to achieve. These errors are as follows:

1. a lack of associating sounds (phonemes) with symbols (graphemes). Here, the teacher needs to take note of specific errors made. For example, younger pupils may make the wrong association between the letter "m" and its corresponding sound in words such as man, more, most, and mail. Helping pupils individually or small group with a strategy to make the correct association is a must!

2. difficulties in making reversals, also called dyslexia, when consistently reading the letter "b" for the letter "d." This is generally a problem in making reversals. There are younger as well as older pupils who have the dyslexia problem in learning to read. The teacher then needs to plan a strategy whereby each pupils who makes this error can overcome the problem successfully. The instruction should incorporate plans whereby the pupil must look at the word starting at the beginning and not at the end. Sometimes a pupil will read an entire word from right to left instead of left to right, such as in the following: "saw" for "was," and "pal" for "lap." Words within a sentence may also be transposed as a common error. Here, the pupil does not follow the order of words as given in a reader or library book, but reads the words more or less in a random way.

2. failure to use context clues to identify unknown words in reading. If a pupil fails to use context clues, he/she pronounces any word, even those that do not make sense, for the unknown. Pupils when not recognizing a word, at least should pronounce a word that does make sense and is meaningful within that sentence. If a word is not recognized within a sentence, the pupil should be guided to put in its place, one that relates to the rest of the words within the content being read, namely within the sentence. Context clues are valuable to use for pupils in that it is a method to ascertain the unknown word. In fact, it is one of the best approaches to use in assisting pupils to identify what is an unknown word. If the use of context clues is not adequate, the pupil should also associate that first letter of the unknown word with the relating phoneme or sound. Very frequently, that approach helps pupils to become independent in word recognition. There still are additional procedures to use in realizing what appeared to be the unknown. These other methods include associating graphemes with phonemes in final and medial sounds, using picture clues, syllabication, as well as structural analysis.

3 failure to use thought units when reading. Meaningless reading

may occur when a pupil does not use thought units in phrasing. Thus a pupil may omit commas, such as in the following sentence, "Bill, my cousin lives in Settle, Washington," which actually should be read, "Bill, my cousin, lives in Settle, Washington." Omitting one comma in phrasing makes a big difference as to the meaning of a sentence. As another example, a pupil may read a sentence with the following inappropriate pauses: "The large horse had a brown tail." Rather the sentence with proper thought units should read, "The large horse/ had a brown tail." Many misunderstandings occur with the use of improper thought units when reading subject matter, be it narrative or expository. The author remembers well when pupils in a small two teacher rural school he was teaching in were rehearsing a play for the last day of school program. One pupil said his part in the following way within a play, "Easy Joe Shirley, will be coming soon." The play part, rather, should be said orally in the following way, "Easy Joe, Shirley will be coming soon." In the first of these two sentences, it sounds as if the person's name is "Joe Shirley," whereas two separate individuals are be mentioned here. In university classes taught, the writer likes to use the following examples of reading in thought units: At the picnic, they had ham sandwiches jello salad and milk. How many items of food did they have at the picnic? Students need to do considerable thinking to realize the number of food items that were in evidence at the picnic, if proper phrasing or thought units were used, indicate the following:

a. At the picnic, they had ham sandwiches, jello salad, and milk.
b. At the picnic, they had ham, sandwiches, jello salad, and milk.
c. At the picnic, they had ham, sandwiches, jello, salad, and milk.

Depending upon thought units read, there might be many interpretations of meaning for a specific sentence.Commas in writing stress pauses in oral communication. These pauses emphasize thought units. Without commas, sentences a, b, and c above, may certainly have numerous meanings.

"Run on sentences" read by pupils may do much to make meanings hazy. If a pupil omits a period between two sentences, such as the following, clarity is not involved in expressing oneself: The boy walked hurriedly in the store he saw toys. In actuality, the two sentences should read as follows: The boy walked hurriedly. In the store, he saw toys. With no attention paid to punctuation marks, the sentences may be read in the following ways:

1. The boy walked. Hurriedly, in the store he saw toys.
2. The boy walked hurriedly. In the store, he saw toys.
3. The boy walked hurriedly in the store. He saw toys.

It is quite obvious that pupils need to pay careful attention to punctuation marks in sentences when reading silently and aloud, as well

as in oral communication experiences. Communication meaningfully with others is vital and pupils need to experience reading and speaking in thought units (Ediger, 1999, 7-15).

Issues in the Reading Curriculum

There are numerous issues that principals and teachers need to be cognizant about in order to not be swayed by slogans and band wagon approaches. Each issue needs careful study and deliberation before coming to any decision as to which one to adopt or consider. Perhaps, the best approach is to tailor make a program adapted to the personal needs of a child.This means that principals and teachers must study in depth diverse philosophies in reading instruction and come up with the one that assists each pupil to achieve optimally. There, no doubt, is much merit in multiple procedures in the teaching of reading.

Phonics versus whole language approaches is being debated much in terms of the merits of each. There are writers in reading instruction who favor only one approach, which they say is based on research (See Daniels, Zemelman, and Bizar, 1999). Others will write on research results favoring the opposite philosophy of reading instruction.

Phonics advocates in the teaching of reading base their arguments on the following reasons:

1. pupils need tools to unlock unknown words. What is a better approach than to have phonics knowledge and skills to assist in determining what an unknown word is while being engaged in reading.
2. the English language is consistent enough between grapheme and phonemes to warrant definite instruction in phonics generalizations.
3. whole language approaches in reading instruction is not adequate. Pupils meet unknown words with no approach to ascertain and analyzing these words. Phonics provides ways of associating sounds with symbols. Pupils then have a system to decipher the unknown and that is through relating sounds and symbols in reading abstract words.
4. whole language approaches provide too many individual words for pupils to master with no procedure available to determine what an unknown word is in reading.
5. phonics actually harmonizes with the whole language approach since unknown words can be analyzed in context. However, a more systematic approach n teaching phonics needs to be in evidence for pupils to relate graphemes and phonemes.

Whole language advocates belief that meaningful reading is lacking when a systemic procedure of phonics instruction is being stressed. What is important , these advocates say, is for pupils to read for understanding and not be distracted with phonics instruction. Other

reasons provided are the following:

1. many unknown words can be identified by pupils through the use of context clues. This should be emphasized while pupils are reading for meaning of narrative or expository content.
2. pupils focus on what is being read, rather than upon analyzing words, such as in phonics.
3. systematic teaching of phonics gets into the way of pupils understanding subject matter read. Rather, pupils may learn to identify words through the Big Book approach, repeated reading, personalized reading, experience chart methods, and one on one procedures of instruction whereby pupils read the entire selection without segmenting words.
4. enjoyment of reading ideas motivates learners in wanting to read as compared to laborious emphasis placed upon the study of grapheme/phoneme relationships.
5. wholeness is involved when anyone reads, due to the entire reading selection having meaning rather than isolate facets with pupils separating words into component parts such as in word analysis (Ediger, 1998, Chapter One).

Phonics advocates may advocating the following arguments for their methods of reading instruction:

1. phonics use provides pupils with ways to unlock unknown words, such as in assisting learners to associate phonemes with graphemes.
2. there are too many words to master in whole language and no key is provided for word recognition. Phonics instruction provides this key.
3. phonics instruction makes for independence in word recognition since pupils can independently tackle the unknown.
4. fewer words need to be mastered through sight and these are words that lack consistency between symbol and sound such as those ending with "ough," as in through, though, rough, cough, bough, dough, and the "ough" in sought. Words which are spelled in an inconsistent manner still have consistently spelled parts, such as in the word "phone," the letter "n" relates directly in a grapheme/phoneme relationship. "Phone" ends in a silent letter, preceded by a consonant, and therefore the letter "o" has a long vowel sound
5. phonics might well be used with whole language approaches, such as in context, when guiding pupils to make the necessary grapheme/phoneme association.

Perhaps, whole language and phonics approaches possess more compatibility than what their respective advocates say. Thus, pupils may be taught phonics as the need arises and that need occurs in a

contextual situation, not with isolated words. When a pupil cannot identify a word while reading, the teacher may point attention to individual letters and the sounds they make. Sometimes, it takes very little effort in these kinds of situations to recognize a word. Even by looking at the first latter of the unknown, pupils may identify that word, especially when it fits in meaningfully with the rest of the words in the sentence. When a word is not recognized, the pupil might be able to make it known by reading the next sequential sentence. Pupils need to develop personal skills to identify unknown words (See Ediger, 1999, 46-55).

Reading Poetry

Principals may provide much leadership in helping teachers in teaching poetry in the classroom. Reading poetry adds to the kinds of materials available for instruction. Pupils like variety. There are pupils who are great consumers of poetry. Others may not care for poetry, but might become interested with stimulating methods of instruction. The teacher should always have access to an anthology of children's literature on his/her desk so that suitable poems may be read and discussed with learners, along with those poems contained in the basal reader. Holiday poems generally are very much liked by pupils, such as Halloween poetry. Poetry read to and by children should pertain to ongoing units of study in each curriculum area. Poetry read and written by pupils should cut across the curriculum areas. An integrated poetry curriculum is then in evidence.

Poetry for children should have contributions from both men and women poets so that pupils realize that poetry has been of interest and contributed by both. An interesting bulletin board display developed and discussed with pupils may certainly help to encourage learner motivation and purpose. Pictures of selected poets and a few lines of chosen poetry for each poet should be a part of the bulletin board display. A title and attractive background colors for the display can do much to enhance poetry reading and writing by pupils.

Principals should assist teachers in having pupils use poetic devices to encourage interest and experimentation in writing poems. Poetic devices include alliteration. Here, pupils hear, read, ad write poetry that have the same beginning sounds consecutively on a line. For example, one pupil had written the following, placed in a bound volume where I supervised student teachers and cooperating teachers in a public school: The bird swayed, stretched, sang, and saddled on a tree limb, being blown by the wind. There are two places in this line of verse where alliteration is used, such as "swayed," "stretched," and "sang" with each word beginning with the "s" sound. The words in sequence "being" and "blown" also begin with the same initial sound to emphasize

alliteration.

A second poetic device used by selected poets is imagery. Imagery involves making a creative comparison between two things within a sentence of verse. Similes are one of two kinds of imagery. The following is an example: The bird flew as a comet in the sky. The words "like" or "as" are used in making these comparisons. In this case the word "like" was used to compare "The bird flew" with "a comet in the sky." Metaphors do not use the words "like" or "as," such as in the following: The sky, painted in ghostly colors, is beautiful to observe. Here, "The sky" compared with "painted in ghostly colors" represents a metaphor since the words "like" or "as" are not used in making the creative comparison. A third poetic device that pupils should experience is onomatopoeia. Onomatopoeia emphasizes that words make echoic sounds. Thus, one child I observed in the classroom when supervising teachers wrote the following: The rock thrown into the pond water went swoosh, swash, and splish. The words "swoosh," "swash," and "splish" tend to make their individual sounds as the rock hits the water from an angle at a somewhat rapid speed. Incidentally, this line also has alliteration with these same three words containing the initial "s" sound.

There are diverse forms of poetry for pupils to write with teacher assistance. thus, rhymed verse may be written such as couplets (containing two lines of ending words rhyming; triplets (three lines of verse with all ending words of each line rhyming); quatrains (four lines with all ending words rhyming), limericks (five lines with lines one, two. and five rhyming, as well as lines three and four having rhyme). Rhythm and meter are important in writing and reading poetry. Poetry based on a certain number of syllables per line include haiku (three lines with a 5-7-5 progression of syllables per respective line); and tankas (5-7-5-7-7 progression of syllables per respective line). Free verse has no needed rhyme nor syllabication, unless the pupil desires to incorporate it.

There are pupils who like to set lines of poetry to music. Gardner (1993) emphasizes Multiple Intelligences Theory in the curriculum whereby pupils individually possess diverse abilities. One of the eight intelligences listed by Gardner is musical intelligence. Pupils should have ample opportunities to indicate what has been learned through the use of one or more of these eight intelligences. In addition to setting verse to music, they might also wish to draw or illustrate a poem; artistic intelligence may then be involved.

Poetry needs to be read aloud and shared. Beauty in language is to be observed and appreciated. Choral reading can vary learning experiences in reading poetry aloud. Creative dramatics and pantomime may also be brought for pupil enjoyment and interpretation (See Ediger, 1999, 53-59).

In ending workshops for teachers in poetry writing, the writer has stressed learners in the entire class be involved in writing a diamante. This provides excitement, enjoyment, and challenge to workshop participants. The diamante is diamond shaped, consisting of seven lines with the following pattern:

line one has a title containing a noun subject
line two has two single word adjectives referring to the noun subject
line three has three single word participles modifying the subject
line four has four single word nouns, each referring to the title noun
line five has three single word participles referring to the four nouns in line four
line six has two single word adjectives, referring to line four
line seven has a single noun, opposite of the title in line one.

By following the seven lines as described above, all fifteen of my total workshop participants came up with the following diamond shaped diamante:

Piazzas
yummy, delicious
enticing, overeating, smelling
nourishment, snacks, enjoyment, pleasure
relishing, exemplifying, tasting
plentiful, pleasant
sandwiches

Conclusion

The principal of the school needs to assist teachers in teaching reading to all pupils so each may become a successful reader. Objectives for reading instruction must be chosen carefully, after much study and deliberation. Objectives need to be challenging and yet achievable, Learning opportunities to achieve these objectives need to be varied so that pupils individually benefit as optimally as possible from instruction. Evaluation procedures should assist in ascertaining if the reading objectives have be attained by learners. Those not attained need diagnosis and remediation. Pupils need a quality reading curriculum in which knowledge, skills and attitudinal ends are achieved.

Principals and teachers must be on the lookout for innovative programs of reading instruction which guide learners to become proficient readers. Technology has had tremendous impact upon school

use in teaching reading. Drill and practice, tutorial, simulation, and games can be of vital interest in using technology as a means of teaching reading. Parental involvement in improving the reading curriculum is essential (See Hoerr, 1997).

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